



WORLD CHRONICLE

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PROGRAMME: "WORLD CHRONICLE"

GUEST: Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the
United Nations Conference on Environment
and Development

JOURNALISTS: Ian Steele, Press Foundation of Asia

Judith Aita, USIA Press Service

Tuyet Nguyen, UPI

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development discusses the importance of this international meeting which will be held in Brazil in June 1992. The Conference is expected to highlight the environmental crisis which threatens the collapse of the planet. Mr. Strong expects the Conference to adopt two major documents: The Earth Charter and a Plan of Action (Agenda 21), to implement the results of the Conference in the next century. In addition, he says, the Conference is designed to focus on the political, environmental and technological issues which separate the North and South.

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VOICE: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Over the last few decades, modern technology and industrial development have improved the standard of living in many countries. But, is the cost to the environment too high? Now the air we breathe is more polluted, forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate and industrial waste is damaging our environment and so threatening the health of the world's population. Alarmed by the rapid deterioration of the global environment, the world community decided to hold a conference to address the issue. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or UNCED will be held in Brazil in 1992.

Our guest today, Maurice Strong, is the Secretary-General of UNCED. A national of Canada, Mr. Strong will be interviewed here at United Nations headquarters in New York by: Ian Steele of the Press Foundation of Asia; Judith Aita of USIA Press Service; and Tuyet Nguyen of United Press International.

Before we begin our discussion with Mr. Strong, let's look at one country's dilemma in finding the balance between environment and development. Our correspondent Steve Whitehouse reports:

WHITEHOUSE: It's a sight all too common in the world's tropical forests. Slash and burn agriculture. For poor campesinos in Panama, it's

the easiest way to provide for their families, as Nestor Trujillo explains:

NESTOR TRUJILLO: (in Spanish)

"One year you can plant either corn or beans. The next year you can use the soil for other crops".

WHITEHOUSE: But after two years, the fields are abandoned and the top soil quickly washes away in tropical rains. Panama's losing 70,000 hectares of forest a year. But more is at risk than the fragile ecosystem. Also threatened, the nation's most valuable economic assets.

Eighty percent of the country's electricity comes from hydroschemes fed by the forest watershed.

Even more important, a government study warns that water runoff for one of the world's most vital waterways is beginning to be affected.

The Panama Canal depends on fresh water to fill its locks. Each ship uses 52 million gallons but the increasing soil erosion is causing sedimentation which is endangering the vital water reservoir. Efforts are underway to reverse the destruction of the forests.

In Santa Cruz province, campesinos learn new farming methods. These combine reforestation with cash crops. Antonio Rodriguez of the Renewable Natural Resources Institute explains how the government helps:

RODRIGUEZ: (in Spanish)

"We give them grants of forestry and fruit seeds, agro-chemicals and equipment so they will be able to do the work".

WHITEHOUSE: José and Crescencia Guerrel are among those benefitting. Granted four hectares of land, they now supplement their income by growing vegetables, cultivating fish and reforesting bald mountain slopes.

Coffee is preferred as it's shade-tolerant and flourishes under big trees. Pine trees are also favoured as they grow fast and require little care.

The pilot project shows what can be done. But 95 per cent of campesinos continue with their old ways. Panama has developed a forestry action plan with help from the UN Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization. It outlines what should be done. FAO expert Patricio Hurtado:

HURTADO: "It includes reforestation which could avoid all the sedimentation problems in the Canal where we spend millions of dollars to dredge its bottom."

WHITEHOUSE: Saving Panama's tropical forest -- the key to preserving the health of the Panama Canal. Striking the balance between the

environment and development -- the major theme at the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Strong, the decision to hold the Conference in Brazil, which has also been doing a pretty good job at destroying tropical forests, was that a deliberate decision to sort of take the Conference to the heart of the matter, so to speak?

STRONG: Brazil was one of several countries that offered to host the Conference and because the first major conference on environment had been held in the North, in Stockholm in 1972, I think it was a rather understandable decision that Brazil, as one of the leading developing countries, would seem an appropriate place. So the General Assembly accepted the invitation in Brazil. Now, I do take issue with your statement that seems to suggest that Brazil had a disproportionate responsibility for some of our environmental ills. A lot of attention has been focused on the Amazon, but what has been happening in the Amazon and other developing countries is at least as much a response to the kind of economic conditions that we in the North have created and the kind of pressures that we have placed on these resources. And we have to bear in mind that we in the North with our indulgent and wasteful patterns of production and consumption are the primary source of the principal global risk, so I think we have to keep that in balance. Brazil was not selected because it is a major offender. It's actually doing some extremely good things and needs to do some things that need our help and support and not condemnation.

LITTLEJOHNS: I wasn't intending to condemn Brazil, Mr. Strong. What do you expect to come out of the Conference? Is it going to be a sort of development charter, an environment charter? What actually will be the result of this Earth Summit?

STRONG: Well, the results will really be first, a basic statement of principles or charter, which will set out the basic principles of conduct between nations and peoples amongst themselves and towards the earth. Then secondly, an agenda 21, an agenda for the twenty-first century setting out a whole series of very concrete actions that are taking over two years to negotiate in detail to give effect to those principles. Then finally, the means to do it through commitment of the financial resources in decisions on how the cost of this will be paid, how those costs will be distributed, particularly how the costs to developing countries of the measures that they must take, will be met through new and additional financial resources, and how they will be able to access the technologies that they need and that it's in our interest to ensure that they have on an affordable basis, and finally, institutional changes. What kind of changes do we need to make in the institutions of the international community, particularly the UN and at the national level. There also will be signed at the Conference in Rio in June 1992, two important conventions that are now under negotiation: one on climate change and one on biodiversity.

STEELE: Mr. Strong, the Conference preparations have had some very pessimistic reviews as you've no doubt been following them. There's a serious rift between the developed and the developing countries principally over the industrialized world's reluctance to pick up its share of the financial and other responsibilities, in particular to help the developing countries be more responsible, if that is, in fact, the correct word. Do you believe that these differences can be bridged before the Rio Conference sufficiently to avoid a free-for-all?

STRONG: Well, I think we have to understand that those who are surprised that there are differences, certainly aren't

looking very carefully at the situation. That is exactly why we have a conference; a conference is designed to focus special political attention and special political energies on issues that are difficult, and this is a difficult issue inherently and it should be therefore, no surprise that the negotiations which are preceding the Conference are difficult negotiations and it's true too, that the differences between North/South on the financial resources issues and on the technology issues are important, but we've made progress on them and I'm confident that by the time we reach Rio that that gap will be bridged.

STEELE: Obviously, the people who are writing about the Conference aren't privy to the reasons why you would be optimistic at this point, and the President of the Group of 77 for example, is saying -- the Group of 77 being the group that represents the developing countries -- is saying that if there is no agreement then there won't be the support of the developing countries for the protection of the environment. How seriously do you take that threat? Is it rhetoric at this point? Obviously the issues are serious. Why are you optimistic at this point?

STRONG: Well, I'm optimistic only because the negotiations are being engaged. They're not sitting throwing bricks at each other; they are sitting around the table negotiating these issues and of course, both sides -- there are not just two sides here, they're a multiplicity of sides in effect -- but have recognized the importance for the whole world of this Conference and the importance of making decisions and of coming together on these issues, and I believe that the evidence that it is in our common interest to do this is so compelling that in the final analysis, that sense of necessity and imperative will drive an agreement. Now that isn't to say there aren't difficulties but though you

suggest that all the commentaries are negative, that's just not so. Of course you can pick out some negative commentaries and they're correct in the sense that there are difficulties. They're not correct in the sense that the thing isn't going well. I think it is are going very much as we should expect it to be.

AITA: Mr. Strong, are all the participants in the Conference agreed on what the problems are? I'm thinking for example, on climate change. There seems to be a great degree of difference among scientists on climate change and how drastic. Are the basic problems all agreed upon?

STRONG: Well, there is not agreement on every detail but on the climate change issue, for example, after some very intensive examination by some of the world's leading scientists through the inter-governmental panel on climate change, there is a broad consensus among scientists. Now of course, there are those who challenge that consensus, but the broad consensus does, in fact, make it clear that we are changing the filtering mechanism in the atmosphere on which climate depends, and that that change is going to be followed by some very important consequences for life on earth. The details of those consequences are controversial, yes, but there is an overwhelming scientific consensus that the problem exists and requires immediate action.

AITA: Would this in any way affect the agenda? I mean does it matter if there's not an agreement on all aspects of it? Can an agenda of programmes still be drawn up successfully without more commonality?

STRONG: Well, I'm just saying that you're not correct when you say there isn't. There is a broad scientific consensus on

the fact that we do have a climate change problem and that we should act on it very quickly. There are differences on details but we would be as wrong to ignore the evidence as we would if we as individuals were told by our doctors we have high cholesterol, high blood pressure, you know, high blood sugar, we're overweight, etc. He can't tell you you're going to die tomorrow morning, but he can tell you that you better take some remedial action and that's the position we're in respect to our planet. There is overwhelming evidence that we must take remedial action on the climate issue and on other global environmental issues just as in the individual. Do we really think it would be wise to wait for the post-mortem to see whether all the evidence was exactly right?

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Strong, it doesn't seem to be a political consensus here in the United States, particularly Mr. Sununu, White House Chief of Staff, remains to be convinced by the scientific evidence.

STRONG: Political consensus is another thing, and of course, there isn't a political consensus. If there were, we wouldn't need the conference and the negotiating processes could be closed off very quickly. There is not a political consensus in the United States, as you say, but that's true in other parts of the world, too. There are many issues in which there is not yet consensus but the process of building that consensus is exactly what the Conference is all about and that's why we have almost two and a half years of intensive preparations and negotiations, that's what they're for, is to try and narrow those differences and build that consensus. We're well along in that, but the job hasn't been done yet and while I believe that it can be done, and will be done before Rio, it's still an open question.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is **WORLD CHRONICLE**. Our guest is Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

NGUYEN: Mr. Strong, how would the Earth Charter affect the other international treaties and those conventions now being drafted by the United Nations? I'm talking about, for example, the Code of Conduct for Transnationals. They're waiting for the results of the Earth Summit to really work on their own convention.

STRONG: It will have an influence on many other international agreements, both binding agreements and voluntary programme-type agreements, because in effect, it will set out fundamental principles of conduct. For example, the "polluter pays" principle -- should that apply on an international level? It's already been agreed in principle that it should apply within nations, should it apply amongst nations? Principles like that will become very important to other international agreements and documents.

NGUYEN: You know that the issue of sovereignty has come up lately in the United Nations. How do you envisage any police measure to enforce the charter?

STRONG: If you're talking about enforcement of the charter generally in security areas, I think we've seen evidence of that in the response to the Iraq invasion of Kuwait. But in environmental terms, I think we are going to have to move towards more and more internationally agreed enforcement measures. I think that's important, but I don't see use of your word "police action" being appropriate. I think that in the environment and development field, there are a good many measures and sanctions

available to the world community to enforce environmental agreements, but we first of all have to get those agreements.

NGUYEN: Are governments called to really give up a little bit of their sovereignty in order to accept those treaties?

STRONG: I don't look at it as a giving up of sovereignty. I look at it as the exercise of sovereignty by governments in a collective framework through international agreements which they are not capable of exercising or where it's not in their interest to exercise that sovereignty alone. This is true of many, in fact, all global environmental issues. Even the most important and powerful countries cannot go it alone on global environmental issues. The environment is a unitary whole and we have to approach it through the collectivity of nations and that doesn't mean abdicating their sovereignty, but it does mean exercising that sovereignty in cooperation with others because it's not capable of being exercised unilaterally.

STEELE: Mr. Strong, I'd like to follow that thought, if we could assume for a moment that the Earth Summit is going to be a success and like you, I've got my fingers crossed, too. I think it's fairly obvious that the UN, other than providing a symbolic umbrella for this kind of event, doesn't have the present capacity to do a great deal more at the end of the day. Have you given some thought to the future of the UN within the context of the environment -- what the UN's capacity should be in order to play an effective role in the future?

STRONG: I think the past twenty years since Stockholm have demonstrated the need for an effective UN presence in this field, and in fact, the usefulness of that. It was the UN that first brought the ozone issue, through the United Nations Environment

Programme and the climate change issue, both were primarily nourished and put together as issues and the framework for dealing with them was put together in the UN, notably through the United Nations Environment Programme. Now, we recognize that all the various development organizations of the UN, including the Bretton Woods Institutions, IMF and World Bank, have an important impact in their policies on the environment and the whole message of the real conference, that it is largely through changes in our economic behaviour and in our economic policies and the implementation of those policies at the level of governments, international agencies and business that we're going to have to address these issues. So we now recognize that responsibility and accountability cannot be just in environmental agencies, it's got to be in the development organizations and therefore the development organizations of the UN system have got to have a much strengthened role as well as strengthening of UNEP's role.

STEELE: If we could talk about the UN Environment Programme which you headed from the very beginning -- you have the small programme in Nairobi, you have the environment grafted on to the best intentions of the agencies, you don't have the framework for management of a global agenda at the present time. Do you see the need for a super-agency to manage environmental affairs? Are we moving in that direction? Surely this Conference is going to demand a quantum leap and certainly a leap of imagination in terms of the UN's capacity for the future.

STRONG: There's no question that the Conference must come up with a new and strengthened framework through which the UN can support governments -- that's what it does -- in addressing these issues of integrating environment and economic behaviour into our decisionmaking processes. Now, that does mean a vastly strengthened UN system. It does not require a super-agency

because what we have to recognize is that the environment is actually affected by the policies and actions of a whole series of organizations in the economic field, in the field of industry, urban affairs, transporation, energy, agriculture, and we have to create a management and framework within which these can cooperate together, and that's in fact what we are doing in our preparations for the Conference. We are, I think, at a real breakthrough in bringing the various elements of the UN together in these areas and in encouraging governments to do the same thing at the national level. So, I think the process of preparing for the Conference has, at the same time, prepared the way for a new management régime to deal with these issues after the Conference.

AITA: Mr. Strong, you mentioned political will. The Conference organizers have expressed the hope that they would have many heads of state attending the Conference. When they had the World Summit for Children, there was a tremendous number of heads of state gathered at UN headquarters and at that time, UNICEF and other agencies had said that many of their programmes such as child immunization really took off when the heads of state got involved in the programme, and that having the heads of state at a world summit really gave the political impetus to the programme. What kind of response are you getting from heads of state and government to attend the Conference?

STRONG: First of all, let me just make it clear, it isn't the Secretariat organizers of the Conference that have called for heads of state to be present, it's a General Assembly decision which, for the first time, has mandated this as a Conference at which all of the government members of the United Nations, all 166 of them, are to be represented by their heads of government, heads of state. Now of course they each have to make their own

individual responses to that invitation. The invitations have just gone out in formal terms but we've had very strong indications from many presidents and prime ministers that they intend to come and I think we'll have well over 100, but that remains to be seen.

AITA: Is the Conference itself going to be, I don't know if the term is right, environmentally correct? I know they expect over 10,000 participants. Is the Conference itself making any effort to set an example, for example, by using biodegradable paper, recycling, no styrofoam?

STRONG: Well, the Conference itself will be setting an example. It will be like many who wish to set an example, a victim in part of the current availability of some environmentally unsound materials. But in terms of vehicles and in terms of recycling of paper, whole series of measures that we are taking, it won't be environmentally perfect because we're still not at a state in which that is possible, but it will, I hope, set a very good environmental example.

NGUYEN: Mr. Strong, the developing countries have called for economic gestures before they can really give the support for the Earth Summit. Do you think the rich, which you say has been responsible for the destruction of the climate or the ozone, do more in order to convince the poor to join in the Earth Summit or the charter?

STRONG: Well, I think the developing countries have been very constructive but they have also been very insistent on the fact that they, of course, share the global risk that we all face. They did not play a major part in creating them, but they are willing to help in resolving them, but it requires

revitalization of their own development, first and foremost and support for that. And it also requires support for the extra costs to them of joining and protecting the global environment. These are very important issues; they are necessary issues and in the larger sense, these issues will determine to a high degree the results of the Conference. But I think what we are seeing in the negotiating process, is yes, some tough positions but we are seeing some real progress, because industrialized countries realize they can't save the global environment without the developing countries. And the developing countries cannot join in saving it without the help and support of the industrialized countries. So this is the reality, and that reality, I think, in the final analysis will determine a positive result.

STEELE: Mr. Strong, there is a fear here among the developing countries that somehow development is going to be dropped off the end at the UN Conference on Environment and Development. We hear about environment, we hear the major issues associated with the environment. How can the Conference guarantee the linkages between environment and development when the focus is so heavily on climate control, new technologies. There seems to be a very strong focus on western concerns, but certainly a need to realize that this is a global conference to address global issues of which the developing countries are a part. Your position vis-a-vis that has been quite strong in the media. Can you push it any further than you are already?

STRONG: Well, I believe strongly and have been asserting at every point, that we cannot deal with global environmental issues without the developing countries; we cannot do it without strong support for revitalizing the development of the developing countries, helping them to eradicate poverty which is just as much an environmental risk as it is a humanitarian and moral

problem and that if we don't do this, we simply won't have the basis for an environmental future for any of us. Development has got to be at the centre of our agenda and the developing countries have got to see that our new found interest in environment, which they share, is something that will also provide new support and not new limitations or new constraints on their development. They need development and we need to support their development if we're going to have a manageable planet and a positive environmental as well as economic future.

STEELE: Do you believe there will be a resolution on technology transfers? Do you think a group of countries or a significant group of industrialized countries will come to the aid of the party and guarantee the transfer of clean, sound, environmentally sound technologies?

STRONG: Again, it's in everybody's interest. It's in our interest, for developing countries to use the most environmentally positive technologies and I believe that that realization is actually providing a rather hopeful basis for an agreement on the subject.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Strong, that's all the time we have. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

Our guest has been Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. He was interviewed here at United Nations headquarters in New York by Ian Steele of the Press Foundation of Asia; Judith Aita of USIA Press Service; and Tuyet Nguyen of United Press International.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE**.

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